



Richard A. Muller, *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), 2003. Logos Electronic Edition, 2013¹.

Muller's brilliant four volume *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* had been available from Baker Academic in print for several years but has, regrettably, of late fallen out of print. Thankfully, Logos has made available these four volumes in electronic format.

Naturally, since it has been available in print, several reviews have been published. For instance, Carl Trueman wrote

"Richard Muller's long-awaited volumes represent a work of vast historical scope, profound engagement with the primary and secondary sources, and careful application of sound historical method. By setting seventeenth-century Reformed theology against the background of classical, patristic, medieval, Renaissance, and Reformation intellectual culture, Muller paints a picture of seventeenth-century Reformed theology that belies the old clichés through its nuance, learning, and sophistication. Nobody engaged in this area can afford to ignore his arguments or his conclusions; those who wish to dissent from his central theses have been set a daunting task, and those who find themselves in agreement have been set a standard for their own research."

Certainly that's a glowing endorsement. There are more thorough, including Martin Klauber's lengthy review in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* from December, 2007:

For the serious student, this series is a gold mine of information that may well lead to further research and publication on a host of the individual theological systems of the Reformed scholastics. Anyone who intends to engage in serious research in this period going forward will have to interact with Muller's very significant work.

¹ <http://www.logos.com/product/4463/post-reformation-reformed-dogmatics>.

And that is exactly the truth. No one studying the Post reformation period and the rise of ‘Reformed Orthodoxy’ or even the history of Christianity from the early 1520’s to the mid 1700’s can afford to ignore these volumes in general or this volume in particular.

Of his purpose, Muller himself writes

The plan of the project was then and remains an examination of three interrelated and foundational elements of Reformed thought (the prolegomena and the two *principia*, Scripture and God), focusing on the time between the beginning of the Reformation and the decline of Reformed orthodoxy, with particular attention to issues of continuity and discontinuity—specifically for the purpose of offering a suitable alternative to the all-too-neat and consistently ahistorical “Calvin against the Calvinists” approach of much that passed for scholarship in the twentieth century (p. 16).

He goes on to suggest

The theology of orthodox or scholastic Protestantism has never been accorded the degree of interest bestowed upon the theology of the great Reformers and has seldom been given the attention it deserves both theologically and historically (p. 28).

Muller corrects this in his work. Brilliantly. There is simply so much here that’s important. The volume could easily be mined for fantastic citations which allow us to see the unfolding of Reformed Theology step by step and doctrine by doctrine. Quite meticulously, Muller presents the evidence. Here are a few snippets which should whet the appetite of those who love learning:

In section 2.3 “The Reformation and Its Theological Presuppositions”, part A, ‘Roots of the Reformation and the Early Reformers’, Muller writes of Zwingli

On the Reformed side, there is not only a movement toward system—as in Zwingli’s *De vera et falsa religione commentarius* (1524), the *Confessio fidei Basileensis prior* (ca. 1532) of Oecolampadius and Myconius, and the *Confessio Helvetica prior* (1536)—but also a growing interest in setting forth theological presuppositions at the beginning of the body of doctrine. Thus, beginning with the *Confessio Helvetica prior*, Reformed confessions virtually without exception present a doctrine of Scripture as the first point to be addressed. As early as Zwingli’s *De vera et falsa religione*, one of the basic issues of future prolegomena is presented at some length—that is, the issue of religion. Bound up with the problem of religion, moreover, is the problem of the effect of sin on knowledge of God and the blurring or distortion of the natural knowledge of God still possible because of the *semen religionis* or “seed of religion” in the mind (pp. 102-103).

And later on, while discussing ‘The Object of Theology’, Muller observes

Zwingli, for example, states the scope of his theological discussion in the *Commentary on True and False Religion* in terms of the identification and defense of true religion against the false forms of religion invented by “the deceitfulness of human wisdom.” Given the nature of true religion as consisting in the reaching out of God toward human beings and the reaching out of human beings toward God, the discussion of the subject matter of true religion will emphasize “discerning God and knowing man”—the former necessarily preceding the latter, inasmuch as sinful man cannot know himself, but must find the source of all his knowledge in God. Thus, God and humanity are the objects of study, with the priority given to God and to the knowledge of God. The focus of that knowledge, moreover, is specifically redemptive. Bullinger, similarly and unequivocally, identifies God as “the object and foundation of our faith” because God is the “chief goodness ... always ready at our need.” (p. 313).

My point in citing so extensively from Muller’s work is to show the clarity of his style and the accuracy of his treatment of Zwingli (and, for that matter, Luther and Calvin and Oecolampadius and all the rest). He gets the Reformers and their descendants right. He doesn’t, like some, simply get Luther right or Calvin right or Zwingli right or Bucer. He gets them all right. He presents their views fairly, without bias and without misrepresentation. And that, reader, is rare. Rare indeed.

Volume One is exceptional. I’ll soon turn to Volume Two to see if it is as well written and carefully presented. At this stage allow me simply to suggest that what Muller accomplishes here is little less than a miracle: a miracle of accuracy, thoroughness, and equity.

Jim West
Quartz Hill School of Theology